RICHARD ALLEN HOMES
Bounded by Poplar St., 9th St.,
Fairmount Ave., and 12th St.
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-6015

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
Philadelphia Support Office
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HABS
PA
51-PHILA,
733-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

RICHARD ALLEN HOMES HABS No. PA-6015

Location: Bounded by Poplar St., 9th St., Fairmount Ave., and 12th St. Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania

USGS Philadelphia Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 18.486980.4424040; 18.486840.4423680; 18.486580.4423780; and 18.486640.4424140

Date of Construction: 1940-1941

Present Owner: Philadelphia Housing Authority
2012 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103

Present Occupant: Tenants of the Philadelphia Housing Authority

Use: Residential

Significance: Richard Allen Homes, also known as the Poplar Project during its planning and early days, was the Philadelphia Housing Authority's (PHA) first low-rent housing project to combine slum clearance with the building of new homes. The PHA built Richard Allen Homes on the northern edge of Center City with loans made available by the Federal Government through the United States Housing Act of 1937. Completed in 1941 and named to honor the founder of Mother Bethel Church and black Methodism, the $7.4-million project transformed 26.7 acres of one of the city's most dilapidated neighborhoods of tenements and bandbox houses into a modern housing development organized around Bauhaus principles. As a group of buildings, the streamlined, utilitarian architecture that incorporated many of the values of European modernism represents an important design type, namely, pre-1945 public housing. This type, which was not unique but rather reflective of the period and the genre, characteristically was driven by function and economy and to the extent possible, by principles of housing reform and slum clearance. Because of Richard Allen Homes' role as governmentally planned public housing for low-income families rooted in President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, it is significant in the areas of community planning and development, politics/ government, and social history. The resource is also significant in the area of architecture for its representation of pre-1945 public housing projects as a distinct design type, one that reflected the social aspirations of planners.

Historical Information

Historic Context:

The history of public housing in Philadelphia has been documented extensively in John F. Bauman's *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal: Urban Planning in Philadelphia, 1920-1974.*[1] Within the broader topic of public housing in Philadelphia, eight housing projects including Richard Allen Homes were built and/or operated by the Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA or the Authority) prior to 1945. For a brief period of time, these eight projects were differentiated as low-rent versus permanent defense workers' housing. The latter were redesignated for families of low income after the Second World War. They were all federally-funded or federally-aided, built under the auspices of the PHA (Hill Creek being the exception) following the same design standards, and managed by the PHA on a day-to-day basis. Although low-rent housing was founded in idealistic principles of housing reform while defense housing emerged from the war emergency, the projects were designed with the same underlying objective: to provide affordable, decent, and economical modern housing.

Public housing is rooted in mid-nineteenth-century principles of housing reform in which reformers saw the association between poor living conditions and the high incidence of crime, juvenile delinquency, prostitution, and other social ills. Progressives believed that by improving the environment, they would conquer the evils of urban life. These urban reformers fell into two groups: professionals and communitarians.[2] The professionals, who began attacking the housing problem in the late nineteenth century, focussed on the physical condition of slums as the key to solving the urban problem. They advocated the building of low-rent housing developments and the enactment of strict tenement-house laws. Communitarians, who emerged as a group in the early twentieth century, took a more sociological approach to the slum problem. While supporting federally-aided homebuilding, they emphasized the restoration of moral order through rebuilding of the community and its values that had been lost in the new industrial order. In New York, Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, and other cities throughout the nation, late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century housing reformers struggled to improve the housing conditions of the working class. In Philadelphia, this effort was pioneered by the Octavia Hill Society. Despite their efforts, urban slums continued to grow in the 1920s as the housing industry built middle-class housing at the expense of needed low-cost dwellings, as municipalities neglected to enforce building codes, and as more and more rural blacks migrated into center city slums.[3] By the 1930s, Philadelphia -- as well as the nation -- was experiencing an acute shortage of safe, sanitary, and affordable housing, as well as the economic hard times of the Depression. This was the setting in which the Federal Government introduced a housing program that evolved into a Federal/local partnership with municipal housing authorities such as the PHA.

Under the National Industrial Recovery Act, approved June 16, 1933 (Public Law No. 67, 73d Congress), the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works (PWA) and its subsidiary, the Housing Division, were established, making housing a long term policy and program of President Frankin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. The Housing Division's immediate objective was "the

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[1] John F. Bauman, *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal: Urban Planning in Philadelphia, 1920-1974* (Phila: Temple University Press, 1987).

[2] *Ibid.*, 5.

[3] *Ibid.*, 19.

provision of jobs for one of the largest and hardest-hit industries in America."[4] In accomplishing its mission to put unemployed architects, builders, and tradesmen back to work, the Housing Division was authorized to select slum sites for clearance and rebuilding in any community. Local participation was always encouraged, either through limited dividend corporations, essentially private sector developers who had little success in meeting financing needs or Housing Division planning standards, or through municipal housing authorities, very few of which were organized by the mid-1930s. To overcome the latter obstacle and to get housing construction underway, the PWA's Housing Division formed the Public Works Emergency Housing Corporation (PWEHC) to act as its agent in clearing slums and building housing until the local housing authorities were ready to assume this role. In the three years prior to 1937, the PWA, through its agent the PWEHC, erected 21,000 low-rent housing units.

On September 1, 1937, President Roosevelt approved legislation that established a national low-rent housing program that made the Federal Government the banker rather than the builder. Known as the United States Housing Act (a/k/a Wagner-Steagall Housing Act), the purpose of this legislation was "to provide financial assistance to the states and political subdivisions thereof for the elimination of unsafe and insanitary housing conditions, for the eradication of slums, for the provision of decent, safe and sanitary dwellings for families of low income and for the reduction of unemployment and the stimulation of business activity." In the Act, Congress created the United States Housing Authority (USHA) and empowered this agency to provide loans (up to 90% of development costs at 3% interest) to local government bodies or authorities to construct low-rent housing projects for families of low income; to award annual subsidy contracts; and to supervise the local agencies. The USHA reported directly to Secretary of Interior Harold L. Ickes, who had supervised the PWA. This meant that the new housing program was administered under the same general policies as the old PWA program. The main difference from an administrative standpoint was the mandatory role the local housing authorities had to play in building and management. This role was to broaden considerably when the Second World War added on responsibilities for defense workers' housing.

Before the states could create local instrumentalities to undertake slum clearance and public housing, they had to provide a legal framework for them. On May 28, 1937, the Pennsylvania Legislature -- in anticipation of passage of the U.S. Housing Act -- approved the Housing Authorities Law of Pennsylvania that established public agencies known as local housing authorities. This law required a local legislative body to declare a need for a local housing authority in order for one to be created. On August 26, 1937, Philadelphia City Council found such a need and passed an ordinance that cited the existence of "numerous unsafe, insanitary, inadequate, or overcrowded dwellings" in the city along with an acute "shortage of decent, safe, and sanitary dwellings within the financial reach of persons of low income." As per the Housing Authorities Law, a city the size of Philadelphia required the appointment of a five-member local Authority: two members appointed by the Mayor, two by City Council, and one by the four appointed members. The first members of the Philadelphia Housing Authority, all of whom served on a voluntary basis, consisted of physician and surgeon W. Harry Barnes, contractor John McShain, realtor Roland R. Randall, President of the Building Trades Council of Philadelphia James L. McDevitt, and Court of Common Pleas Judge Frank Smith who was elected Chairman. (Randall succeeded Smith as the second Chairman in January, 1940.)

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[4] Robert D. Kohn, "The Government Housing Program," *The Architectural Forum* 60 (February 1934), 89.

During the first few years of its existence, the PHA devoted its energies to slum clearance and low-rent housing projects. Slums were viewed not only as a health and economic blight upon the city, but also, as major contributors to crime. Studies undertaken in the 1930s pointed to the central city's high crime bill, unpaid taxes, and demands on welfare and relief agencies. One of the more enlightening studies was the Civil Works Administration's *Report of the Real Property Survey* of 1934, which found that 32% of the dwellings surveyed in Philadelphia were in need of repairs (many of these classified as unfit for human habitation) and that 40% of the sub-standard housing was concentrated in the central slum area. In addition to the problems of existing housing was the shortage of affordable new housing. The *United States Public Health Survey* of 1935 showed that almost two-thirds of Philadelphia's families reported an annual income of less than $1,500, which meant they could not reasonably pay more than $20 to $30 a month in rent, and in 1938, the Philadelphia Housing Authority reported that only 1.4% of all new homes built in 1930-35 had a price of $4,000 or less. Surveys made by the PHA and the Philadelphia Housing Association indicated that at least 50,000 low-rent homes were needed in the city. All these factors clearly supported the City's mission to abolish slums and establish low-rent housing as soon as possible.[5]

The acute shortage of affordable, decent housing was even more of a crisis for Philadelphia's black population which had increased eight fold between 1880 and 1940, compared to the white population that had only doubled. During the decade of the Depression, the black population increased 30,000 whereas the white population actually decreased by more than 50,000.[6] Most of the black in-migrants were absorbed into South, North, and West Philadelphia where the problems of overcrowding and sub-standard housing were already severe. This situation added a racial dimension to Philadelphia's housing crisis and ultimately led the PHA to dedicate its first housing project for black families.

While the USHA was first organizing its new program, the City and the PHA entered into several agreements to get Philadelphia's housing program underway. These included $23,000 in start-up funding from the City; free office space in City Hall Annex and use of City Planning Commission plans and surveys; an agreement for the City to eliminate unsafe or insanitary dwellings in equal number to new dwellings; payments by the PHA to the City and School Board in lieu of taxes; and an ordinance for providing water to the projects. By June 30, 1939, the USHA had allocated $32 million for slum clearance and low-rent housing in Philadelphia. Added to this were local loans for a total of $35.5 million. At that time, the Authority had contracts with the USHA for four sites: Glenwood (James Weldon Johnson), Tasker, Poplar (Richard Allen), and Old Swedes (never built). The United States Housing Act of 1937, which provided the funding for new low-rent housing construction, required the City annually to contribute an amount -- either cash, tax remissions, or tax exemptions -- equal to at least 20% of annual contributions made by the Federal Government to subsidize the projects.

Though the United States Housing Act mentioned slum clearance in tandem with low-rent housing, it also gave the USHA the discretion to defer slum clearance where "the shortage of decent or safe or sanitary housing affordable to low-income families is so acute as to force dangerous overcrowding of such families." This option enabled the PHA to build two of its three pre-1945

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[5]Philadelphia Housing Authority, *Clearing Slums in Philadelphia: First Annual Report of the Philadelphia Housing Authority* (Phila: 1939), 6-8.

[6]Philadelphia Housing Association, "Housing for Negroes in Philadelphia," (29 December 1944), HADVP.

low-rent projects (James Weldon Johnson Homes and Tasker Homes) on vacant or nearly vacant sites.

The PHA evaluated many factors when choosing sites for housing projects. Site selection took into account zoning ordinances and regulations. It also considered comprehensive planning studies that examined factors such as land use; population distribution; the condition of existing buildings on the site and in the neighborhood; information on vacant land, commerical, and industrial structures; and the existence of community facilities such as transportation, schools, churches, libraries, recreation, health services, shopping centers, and employment opportunities. Other considerations were the condition of utility lines, subsoil, drainage, assessed valuations, present land uses, traffic, possible changes in the City Plan, the existence of adverse influences (e.g., smoke, noise), and the relationship of selected areas to city planning, zoning, population density, racial distribution, owner occupancy and rental rates.[7] Given all these factors plus the cost of land acquisition, the Authority selected the four sites for its proposed low-rent housing projects out of careful evaluation of 23 sites.

The PHA actually built and owned three pre-1945 low-rent housing projects that together, provided 2,859 dwelling units: James Weldon Johnson Homes, Richard Allen Homes, and Tasker Homes. It also operated Hill Creek, a 258-unit public housing project built in 1936-37 by the Division of Housing, Public Works Administration, under the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. Hill Creek was one of 48 similar developments undertaken throughout the nation by the Federal Government as demonstrations for low-rent housing. Erected prior to passage of the United States Housing Act of 1937, Hill Creek was owned by the Federal Government, but leased to the PHA in March, 1938. Around this time, PWA projects throughout the nation were divested through sale or lease to local housing authorities. The PHA, which acquired title to Hill Creek in 1954, managed the project as public housing for families of low-income along with the low-rent projects it owned from the start.

The PHA established field offices at each project for Tenant Selection and Management, providing a program of training courses to staff and a "Tenant Selection Manual." In the case of Richard Allen Homes, the Authority first had to maintain a Relocation Office to find suitable housing for the 2,937 persons living on the site prior to demolition of their homes. Philadelphia's low-rent projects were restricted to American citizens who had resided in the city under sub-standard housing conditions for at least one year and whose incomes did not exceed specified family limits designated as "low-income." Dwellings were considered to be sub-standard if they were unsafe, insanitary, or overcroweded, or if they lacked essential sanitary facilities. Annual income limits in 1941 for four persons or less was $1,299; for five or more persons, $1,399. Priority for housing was given to those applicants with the highest urgency for housing and those who had previously lived on the site for six or more months (if a slum clearance project such as Richard Allen Homes). Relief recipients, including WPA, were only eligible for one-fourth the units in each project. Between July 15, 1940, and June 30, 1941, the PHA's Tenant Application Offices handled a total of 9,666 applications for the 3,117 units at the four low-rent housing projects. As a matter of

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[7]Philadelphia Housing Authority, *Clearing Slums in Philadelphia: First Annual Report of the Philadelphia Housing Authority* (Phila: 1939), 17.

policy, the PHA sought to make the racial balance of a project compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.[8]

Although public housing was established in Europe by the 1920s, it was a new concept to Americans in the 1930s. In order to foster understanding and support of housing projects among potential applicants, neighbors, and others, the PHA launched a broad-based public relations campaign. The Authority nurtured good relations with the city's newspapers; invited the public to special events such as ground-breaking and dedication ceremonies and tours of sample homes; addressed audiences at meetings of various organizations and agencies; showed a USHA film, "Housing in Our Time," at meetings and neighborhood motion picture theatres; participated in radio broadcasts; and published numerous pamphlets and leaflets for distribution through churches, social agencies, labor unions, and door-to-door canvassing in the city's slum areas. The PHA also sponsored construction of an exhibit showing models of public housing and invited the public to see demonstration units furnished with affordable, second-hand reconditioned furniture.

Not long after the PHA began implementing its program for low-rent housing, its activities were impacted by the demands of an expanding national defense program. As the United States moved into the production of war goods to aid its European allies, it stepped up the demand for workers in the defense industries which, as in the case of Philadelphia, typically were located in cities already suffering from a housing shortage. The demand for defense workers' housing was soon in competition with available sites for new housing construction and dwellings recently built for low-income families. America's entry into the war made matters even worse. When the War Production Board earmarked $52 million in plant expansion for the city's Baldwin Locomotive Works, Budd Manufacturing, Cramp Shipyard, Philco Electronics, Bendix Aviation, and the Frankford Arsenal, it created more jobs and a need for more decent housing for the anticipated 100,000 additional in-migrant workers.[9]

Conflicting demands between low-rent and defense housing in Philadelphia began in June of 1940. Though it was eighteen months before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. was building toward the war effort. At that time, the Navy requested to make 60 dwellings in Tasker Homes available to families of married enlisted men. By the end of the summer the Navy was asking the Authority and Mayor Lamberton for a project of 1,000 dwellings. This situation was indicative of what was starting to happen on a national level. On June 28, 1940, President Roosevelt approved the Defense Amendment to the United States Housing Act, (Title II, Public 671, 76th Congress, approved June 28, 1940). This amendment enabled local housing authorities to use Federal financing for construction of dwellings for enlisted men of the Army and Navy and for "workers with families who are engaged or to be engaged in industries connected with and essential to the national defense program." Under this USHA program, the local housing authorities could open up its low-rent projects to defense workers without the usual income and residence restrictions. The PHA built additions to James Weldon Homes and Tasker Homes, converted to low-rent use after the war, with Act 671 funding.

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[8]Philadelphia Housing Authority, *Building Homes in Philadelphia: Report of the Philadelphia Housing Authority, July 1, 1939-June 30, 1941* (Phila: 1941), 26, 28.

[9]Bauman, 66-67.

Congress, seeing the need for a more comprehensive program of national defense housing construction, passed the Lanham Act in October, 1940, which authorized the Federal Works Administrator to construct emergency housing for the exclusive use of "persons engaged in national defense activities." Congress appropriated $150 million for this purpose and in April, 1941, doubled this amount. The Act set a limitation of $3,000 for each dwelling structure and its equipment; Congress later raised the budget to $3,500 per unit. The war housing projects originally were built for in-migrant civilian war workers or personnel of the naval or other military establishment. The Federal Public Housing Authority issued eligibility requirements for "an indispensable, in-migrant, civilian war worker" to be anyone engaged in one of a certified list of approximately 250 war industries whose present or more recent residence was beyond reasonable commuting distance, or who desired to bring his family from housing elsewhere, or who was compelled to live under overcrowded or otherwise substandard or temporary conditions so intolerable as to impair his efficiency as a worker.[10]

Based upon a survey of Philadelphia's defense housing needs undertaken by the Regional Defense Housing Coordinator and the PHA, the President allocated Lanham Act funds to the PHA for construction of 2,400 dwellings for industrial defense workers. Because of the City's long-range need for low-rent housing, it was decided to build the defense housing of permanent construction with the idea that it would be converted to low-rent housing at the end of the war. The PHA was designated as agent of the Federal Works Administrator for the construction and management of the defense homes, under the supervision of the United States Housing Authority. The Federal Government acquired and retained ownership of the land. Site studies that had been undertaken by the PHA for low-rent housing were revisited for site selection which was restricted to vacant land for defense housing. The 2,400 units of defense housing were distributed among four projects: Passyunk Homes, Abbottsford Homes, Bartram Village, and Oxford Village. Lanham Act funds were used to construct temporary war housing, too. In Philadelphia these projects, built in 1943 and demolished in the mid-1950s, were Shipyard Homes, League Island Homes, Tacony Homes, and Oxford Village II.

Tensions and the need for coordination between low-rent and defense housing increased once the United States entered the war. Richard Allen Homes, primarily targeted for Philadelphia's poor black families who had occupied the prior slum, is just one example where Washington officials proposed transfering a low-rent project to defense housing, in this case, adding a racial dimension to the problem. This type of predicament led the Federal Government in 1942 to reorganize all its housing programs under an umbrella superagency called the National Housing Agency. Within this organization, the USHA was absorbed into the Federal Public Housing Agency which had been responsible for overseeing defense housing.

In practice, approximately half the families residing in the PHA's low-rent public housing projects were employed in essential war industries, too. Moreover, the higher war wages altered the original character of the projects from a low-rent to semi-war-housing status. This improved standard of living was problematic in that low-rent housing had specific eligibility requirements and income limits. To avoid having to evict families from the low-rent projects during a shortage of decent housing and war time, in August, 1942, the Federal Public Housing Authority adopted a

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[10]Philadelphia Housing Authority, *Homes for War Workers and Families of Low Income: Report of the Philadelphia Housing Authority, July 1, 1941-June 30, 1943* (Phila: 1943), 19.

graded system of emergency maximum rents that preserved reduced rentals for the lowest income groups.[11]

Constructing seven new housing projects over the course of roughly four years was a monumental task. The PHA managed this effort by working on a contractual basis with an architectural staff called the Technical Board, which coordinated the work of architects on the various projects. The Technical Board consisted of Hill Creek architect Walter H. Thomas, Director; Howell Lewis Shay, Architectural Consultant; and Victor D. Abel, Chief of Staff. Commissions for the projects were awarded to various consortiums of architects who won the respective design competitions. These consortiums or design groups consisted of many of Philadelphia's premier architects -- William Pope Barney, Frank R. Watson, George I. Lovatt, John P.B. Sinkler, Edward H. Wigham, Harry Sternfeld, Walter T. Karcher, and Carl A. Zeigler, just to name a few -- who formed associations during the Depression when economics dictated reduced office sizes. The associations provided the manpower requirements for and helped diffuse the risks of large-scale government contracts such as public housing and post office construction.

In the late 1930s, the USHA set basic standards for architects to follow in site planning and unit design for low-rent housing projects. These standards reflected the recommendations of the American Public Health Association; architect-planner Henry S. Churchill, who advocated integration of housing projects into the greater urban community; and the National Association of Housing Officials (NAHO), which supported communitarian architects Clarence Stein and Clarence Perry's concept of a "neighborhood unit" of community social and recreational facilities and a minimum of through traffic.[12] Special attention was given to providing ample sunlight and fresh air, and adequate open space, theoretically for aesthetic, psychological, and recreational purposes. Unlike planning for low-rent housing, which was rooted -- if not always executed -- in the ideals of communitarianism, "housers in Philadelphia and throughout the nation approached the subject of defense housing dispassionately. They still cared about planning but were more intent on the logistics of housing and plant location, on mass building technology, and on the migration patterns of war workers than on the social-psychological elements of housing."[13] While the planners may not have concentrated on the social-psychology of housing for war workers, in practice, the results of site planning and basic unit design were virtually the same for both low-rent and defense housing erected by the PHA. What is apparent in the shift from communitarian idealism to war-time pragmatism is a de-emphasis on aesthethics in favor of even more utilitarianism. This helps explain the relatively unimaginative, repetitive buildings at Passyunk Homes, Bartram Village and Oxford Village when compared to the more creatively designed and somewhat differentiated architecture of Hill Creek and James Weldon Johnson Homes.

Public housing projects in the 1930s and early '40s often were designed as communities with superblocks or neighborhood units created by the closing of unimportant existing streets and restrictions on vehicular traffic. A modern urban community form first propounded by the French architect Le Corbusier and incorporated into the Bauhaus community designs of Walter Gropius and Ernst May, these bold, large-scale, comprehensively planned, freestanding superblock communities, the communitarians claimed, would exert a salutary impact on the residents of the

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[11] *Ibid.*, 9.

[12] Bauman, 48.

[13] Ibid., 59.

project and the surrounding region.[14]

At Hill Creek, James Weldon Johnson Homes, Richard Allen Homes, and parts of Tasker Homes, low-rise buildings were organized around grassy courts. On the PHA's defense housing projects, communal spaces and the ideals behind them received less emphasis: a central recreational field associated with a community building and areas where front or rear yards between parallel buildings created grassy open space. Among the practical issues affecting the siting of buildings into courtyards, linear plans, or other relationships were the spaciousness of the site vis-à-vis the desired density, and the type of heat, i.e., central heating versus individual coal heating that would require service drives to each dwelling unit. The PHA opted for central heating for its projects.

The basic elements of a housing project consisted of: two- to four-story residential buildings of fireproof masonry construction; a community building; a maintenance facility (free-standing or incorporated into the community building); a central recreational field or play area; any number of smaller play or sitting areas; and drying yards. Circulation had to take into account essential services such as garbage and trash collection, parking, and concerns for pedestrian safety. In some cases, such as Hill Creek and Passyunk, stores were incorporated into the site.

The PHA took a "no frills" approach to exterior and interior design. "What survived the authority's scalpel were the stark Bauhaus structures that furnished the basic human needs of clean air and light, while too often economizing on the psychological needs for living space and amenities."[15] Economy of interior space was a priority: room size was kept at a minimum, alcoves became dining rooms, curtains substituted for closet doors, forced hot water unit heaters with fans blowing warm air through ducts were used rather than radiators and exposed piping, and hallways were non-existent. Maintenance was also a concern. Many of the projects were fenestrated with metal casement windows and interior walls were finished with a washable surface. The units were modern when it came to kitchens and bathrooms, especially when compared to the sub-standard housing from which so many of the tenants came. They had refrigerators (PHA member Raymond Rosen was an appliance dealer), running hot and cold water, lavatories, and toilets. The communal spaces on site plans, the functionalism of unit plans, and the sparsity of architectural embellishment -- scattered corbelled or colored brick or cantilevered entry canopies -- linked Philadelphia's public housing projects to their Bauhaus antecedents in Europe.

Whether a part of low-rent or defense housing projects, the community building served as a physical and social anchor. Typically, it was located near the path of the greatest flow of tenant traffic and near the main access road to the project. It contained an auditorium, child care facility, meeting room, crafts workshop, kitchen, and offices, and had an adjacent outdoor play area for young children and in most cases, a central recreational field. In keeping with communitarian ideals, the PHA promoted health, cultural and recreational activities to engender community spirit and to help those families who had relocated for war work to adapt to their new surroundings. Resident Aides provided leadership for community activities which included victory and flower gardening, dramatics clubs, women's clubs, choral groups, homemaking classes, arts and crafts workshops, organized sports, and at some projects, newspapers covering social events. Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops were also active at the projects. Child-care facilities were outstanding:

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[14]*Ibid.*, 49.

[15]Ibid., 51.

The Philadelphia Committee for the Day Care of Childen, a subsidiary of the Council of Defense, provided all-day nursery care for the children of employed mothers at Tasker Homes, James Weldon Johnson Homes, and Richard Allen Homes. Resident volunteers ran the Play Centers for young children at Abbottsford Homes, Bartram Village, Passyunk Homes, and Oxford Village.

The same concerns for efficiency and economy that were incorporated into building design were applied to the landscaping of housing projects. Where possible, existing trees were preserved; new shade trees were spaced to avoid over-shading when mature; plant lists consisted of inexpensive and hardy varieties; large masses of shrubs or groundcovers were planted only where they would be of practical use such as screening garbage cans; and individual shrubs or small trees were avoided for maintenance reasons.[16]

The end of the Second World War inaugurated a period of adjustment at Philadelphia's public housing projects, just as it did in communities and cities throughout the country. With post-war prosperity and higher incomes, eligibility criteria for low-rent housing and rent schedules had to be adjusted. Many of the families that no longer qualified for low-rent housing acquired their own homes in Levittown and other suburbs. Some people who had come to Philadelphia as migrant defense workers returned to their homes; the majority became a permanent part of the city's population.

As per the Lanham Act, Philadelphia's permanent defense housing projects were designed and constructed with the intent that they would be absorbed into the local slum clearance and low-rent housing program at the end of the war emergency or if necessary, be used for Army or Navy housing. On October 1, 1953, the Federal government relinquished title to Bartram Village, Oxford Village, and Abbottsford Homes to the PHA free of charge, with the understanding that the units would be transfered to low-rent use within two years and that veterans or servicemen who served in World War II or families of servicemen who died in the war would be given preference. After a review of family incomes, most of the residents already in occupancy from the war years were allowed to stay. The transfer of Passyunk Homes was delayed until 1957, first by efforts by the Navy to acquire the housing and then by stepped-up activity at the Navy Yard during the Korean War.

The 1950s was a decade in which integration increased at the PHA's housing projects, planting the seeds of racial tensions to come. Throughout the 1960s and'70s, the projects -- each to its own degree -- typically experienced an increase in crime, drugs, and vandalism that led to the formation of tenant organizations and/or a greater role for tenants in managing and monitoring their communities. Today, some of the PHA's pre-1945 public housing projects show a strong sense of community and community pride in their surroundings, while others reflect a tougher struggle with the city's social ills that communitarians of past decades had envisioned curing.

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[16]Tell W. Nicolet,"Slum Clearance under USHA" in "Defense Housing in Brief Retrospect," *Landscape Architect*. 33 (October 1942), 15-16.

History of Richard Allen Homes:

Within the context of pre-1945 public housing in Philadelphia, Richard Allen Homes stands out at the PHA's first low-rent housing project to combine slum clearance with house building. The project is located below Temple University in North Philadelphia in an area of eight city blocks extending from Fairmount Avenue to Poplar Street and Ninth to Twelfth Streets (the southeast block was omitted from the parcel). The PHA undertook a monumental effort when it assembled and cleared the urban land to make way for Richard Allen Homes. The neighborhood contained 583 buildings, 546 of which were dense urban housing, 37 of which were commercial and industrial structures including Merck & Co.'s Chemical Laboratory, a sausage factory, and a varnishing plant. Nearly 3,000 persons occupied the housing, and land and buildings were owned in 657 separate parcels by 590 different owners. The PHA began to obtain options on the properties in 1939 and ultimately acquired 126 parcels through condemnation. The Authority then had to relocate the entire population that lived on the site, "the largest mass-migration within the City in the history of Philadelphia."[17] This effort, assisted by many civic and social agencies, entailed the opening of an on-site Relocation Office staffed with personnel who undertook a site survey, visiting each family and business needing to be relocated and helping to find suitable temporary quarters in the neighborhood.

Of the persons living on the site in 1939, almost 40% of the employed men worked at unskilled laboring jobs: truck drivers, peddlers, junkmen, domestic or personal service occupations, or storekeepers or owners of small businesses on the site. Two-thirds of employed women worked in domestic or personal service. Of all the dwelling units, 88% were occupied by black families.[18] The majority of this population that moved out by the end of 1939 was to occupy the new housing units at Richard Allen Homes; 46 families applied for tenancy in the James Weldon Johnson Homes, the PHA's first low-rent housing project. The PHA targeted the black-white ratio at Richard Allen to be the same as it had been prior to slum clearance of the site.

High among the priorities in public housing design were spaciousness, safety from vehicular traffic, and adequate fire protection. At Richard Allen Homes, buildings were sited around courtyards and east-west streets were vacated by the City and retained as project driveways, thereby excluding all city traffic. Although only 27% of the land was planned to be covered with buildings, the relatively high cost of the land -- the result of demolition and relocation costs -- caused the PHA to make the population density higher at Richard Allen Homes than at its other low-rent projects. This explains why the buildings are three and four stories tall, rather than the more typical two and three stories of Philadelphia public housing projects. Johnson Homes, Tasker Homes, and Richard Allen Homes, all low-rent projects, were each provided with a spacious community center including management offices, crafts workshops, an auditorium, classrooms, a nursery, and at Richard Allen, a branch of The Free Library of Philadelphia. In the community center, "Workshops encouraged residents to practice frugality by decorating their units with salvaged furniture. Project community centers taught civic spirit, and tenant organizations promoted citizenship."[19]

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[17]Philadelphia Housing Authority, *Building Homes in Philadelphia: Report of the Philadelphia Housing Authority, July 1, 1939-June 30, 1941* (Phila: 1941), 19.

[18]*Ibid.*, 19-20.

[19]Bauman, 52.

Groundbreaking ceremonies for Richard Allen Homes took place on October 7, 1940. Eligible to make applications for units were families of two, three, or four persons living on annual income below $1,200, and families of five or more living on annual income up to $1,399. All applicants had to come from dwellings with bad housing conditions. In 1941, Washington proposed transfering Richard Allen Homes to defense workers' housing (for which the PHA would receive an allocation of needed funds from the Federal Government through the Lanham Act). In January of 1942 Roland R. Randall, chairman of the PHA, agreed to give families of defense workers first priority, a decision which essentially would have shut out the city's poor black population from homes that had been targeted for them. After considerable debate, including a plea to Mrs. Roosevelt, the decision was reversed and Richard Allen Home was reserved for predominantly black families of low income.

The first tenants moved into the 1,324 units distributed in 52 buildings in the Spring of 1942. Monthly rents ranged from $14 to $16, including utilities. At the close of 1943, roughly 24% of the project's 5,386 residents were employed, almost half of them in war work. The crime record in the Richard Allen Homes had decreased far below the citywide average, whereas in the previous slum area it was higher. The project housed more people under less crowded conditions, tenants took better pride in the appearance of the neighborhood, and "the accommodations afforded lead to better housekeeping, greater cleanliness and better citizenship generally."[20] In 1947 the PHA raised income ceilings and rents at its low-rent housing projects in compliance with provisions of the U.S. Housing Act of 1937 to provide adequate housing for families of the lowest income group. Approximately 138 families at Richard Allen had to seek housing elsewhere.

By 1953 Richard Allen Homes was already becoming noisy, vandalized, and littered with trash. The 1960s was a decade in which crime notably increased at Richard Allen Homes, which was given round-the-clock police protection. It was also a time when the buildings needed modernization and repairs, for which the Federal Government provided funds in 1967 with the stipulation that the tenant group acquires a greater voice in managing the project and planning the improvements. This stipulation was just part of a round of tensions and conflicts between the tenants and PHA in the upcoming years. Renovations were still in dire need in 1973 when the Housing Assistance Administration, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, funded a program to train youths from Richard Allen, Johnson, and Tasker projects in the various building trades and employ them to do the work.

Architects:

The original plans and specifications for Richard Allen Homes were completed by Architectural Design Group No. 4 (a/k/a the Association of Architects), George I. Lovatt, Director, and John P.B. Sinkler, Assistant Director. This consortium, which won the PHA's 1938 citywide competition, consisted of 34 of Philadelphia's prominent architects -- some of whom were or had been partners with each other (see complete list below). The members of the group organized their dwindling architectural shops into an association to help weather the Depression and meet the manpower requirements for large-scale Federal Government projects such as post offices and public housing.

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[20] *The Bulletin* (7 Dec. 1943).

Director George I. Lovatt was one of Philadelphia's principal architects of Catholic churches and institutional buildings. He studied architecture at the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art in the early 1890s, started his own firm by 1894, and was joined by his son, George I Lovatt, Jr., in 1929. Lovatt retired in 1940, shortly after designing Oxford Village, a relatively small project of defense workers' housing for the PHA in Northeast Philadelphia. John P.B. Sinkler, Assistant Director of Design Group No. 4, was a University of Pennsylvania graduate (1898), who was well connected with the City. After establishing his own firm in 1902 and forming a partnership with E. Perot Bissell in 1906, Sinkler served as City Architect from 1920 to 1924 and in 1932, as Director of the new City Bureau of Architecture.[21]

Association of Architects:

Alfred Bendiner
D.K. Boyd
William M. Campbell
Harold T. Carswell
William H. Chandlee, Jr.
Paul P. Cret
L. Adrian Doe
Donald Folsom
John Hammond
John F. Harbeson
William J.H. Hough
J. Craig Janney
H.M. Kneedler
Roy F. Larson
William H. Livingston
George I. Lovatt
George I. Lovatt, Jr.
Henry D. Mirick
David H. Morgan
William H. Parker
George W. Pepper, Jr.
John H. Rankin
George A. Robbins
Joseph P. Sims
John P.B. Sinkler
Sylvester L. Smith
William C. Stanton
James F. Talbutt
Paul F. Taylor
Marmaduke Tilden, Jr.
Albert E. Westover, Jr.
Theo. B. White
Charles Willing
C.C. Zantzinger, Jr.

Landscape Architect: Robert B. Cridland

General Contractor: HRH Construction Co.

Architect for 1970s window replacement: William A. Mann

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21 Sandra L. Tatman and Roger W. Moss, *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects: 1700-1930* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1985).

Architectural Description

Description of Site:

Richard Allen Homes is located in eight city blocks of Philadelphia in a roughly rectangular site extending from the elevated rail lines of the old Reading Railroad, west along the north side of Fairmount Avenue to Twelfth Street and along the south side of Poplar Street, excluding the block bordered by Ninth, Tenth and Brown Streets and Fairmount Avenue. The site is divided by the numbered north and southbound streets, but the east-west streets and alleys were vacated (surviving as driveways for the residents) creating oversized blocks that break the grid of the city.

The complex of buildings that constitute the Richard Allen Homes were constructed as the result of a single project over a single year.

Evolution of Site:

The *Philadelphia Atlas* by John Bromley for 1910 shows a site that was largely small rowhouses, ranging from tiny one room per floor buildings to larger structures, interspersed with manufacturing and warehousing buildings located principally along the tracks of the Reading Railroad.[22] Of these, the largest and most important were buildings for the Powers, Weightman and Rosengarten Chemical Works, the antecedent of Smith, Kline Beecham, the modern pharmaceutical giant. Stables, a gas meter factory and other small businesses were interspersed with housing on the majority of the tract. Philadelphia Public Schools served the site from the 1850s; a modern elementary school building, erected in 1929, occupied the site of an earlier building (erected 1875) at the corner of 12th and Ogden.[23] It remains within the boundaries of the Allen Homes.

The land for the project was acquired by the Philadelphia Housing Authority beginning in 1939 and the entire site of 25.9 acres was turned over for construction in 1940 after displacing and relocating more than 1000 families.

Fire codes and the requirement that these be walk-up units kept the height of the Allen Homes to three and four stories, and caused the architects to allocate 27% of the site to buildings, with additional land given to drives, clothes drying yards, play area shelters, and other functional requirements, leaving a small portion for play yards, and small areas adjacent to housing units for grass and flowers. In the intervening years, the majority of the site has been paved with blacktop, to reduce maintenance, and to provide parking for automobiles. Despite these alterations to the secondary features of the landscaping, the principal features of the site, the blocks of housing, remain as they were from the original construction.

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22 John Bromley, *Bromley Atlas of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: 1910) Plate 12.

23 F.D. Edmunds, *The Public School Buildings of the City of Philadelphia from 1875 to 1889*, (Philadelphia: 1926), 4-7. The building was called the Spring Garden School and was designed by Lewis Esler in 1875. It replaced the 1852 Primary School #8 which was located a block away on the west side of Twelfth Street. The 1875 building was replaced in 1929.

The Block Plan

The block plan devised by the architects followed the general formula that evolved in the Philadelphia Housing Authority which in turn was based on the chief example of modern housing in Philadelphia, Oscar Stonorov's 1933-4 project for the Hosiery Workers' Union Housing at Juniata Park in northeast Philadelphia, called the Carl Mackley Apartments.[24] Unlike the Mackley Apartments, which took the form of long rows running north-south to provide good lighting in each unit, interspersed with community rooms and other public spaces, the Allen Homes plan is more varied with buildings running north and south as well as east and west. On four of the blocks, a standard plan evolved with rows of housing along the four sides of the block, and with two shorter rows running north and south in the middle of the interior space of the block; on the center-most block, a community building occupied the position of the northern row of buildings, but otherwise the composition was similar. Because of the noise and pollution from the railroad tracks on Ninth Street, the eastern north-south row was built in close proximity to the Tenth Street row leaving the end walls of the east-west rows facing the east side of the blocks, while the location of a new warehouse at Ninth and Poplar, and the desire for a maintenance building resulted in squeezing another east-west row parallel to the row on Poplar Street, eliminating the north-south row along Ninth Street. Finally, the northwest-most block contained the Spring Garden School resulting in the shortening of the row facing Twelfth Street, and the east-west rotation of one of the central rows to leave room for the school.

Despite these variations, the intentions of the planners are clear. Blocks were framed by buildings creating quiet spaces within; as many rows as possible ran north-south to ensure even opportunities for day light for the tenants. And, common spaces such as play-yards and the public rooms of the community building received a long south facade for maximum light and comfort.

Complex Design

The complex was designed to foster interaction and thus to develop a sense of sharing and community. This was accomplished both by the layout of the buildings and the grounds. In the buildings, all units were entered from shared entrances, thereby avoiding invidious comparison between upper and ground level units. Similarly, basements of the buildings were designed to be shared space. The typical basement contained a laundry facility, in addition to the furnaces that heated each building.

The grounds were designed for the same purposes. All of the space was shared with no private yards permitted by fencing. Instead, each group of buildings shared an interior courtyard that contained drying yards for clothes, an artifact of laundry before private dryers. Courts also contained steel pipe playground equipment and small shelters or "shade sheds" to protect children from the direct sun in the treeless open play areas. These areas were also to be shared as a part of the planning of the complex.

Other areas of the complex design have been changed to reflect changing social conditions. Into the 1970s, mail was delivered to each unit. With the invasion of drugs and other social ills, a new mail room was established at the community building which protected the mail deliverers.

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[24]Richard Webster, *Philadelphia Preserved*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: 1981), 332.

Landscaping

The planners of Richard Allen Homes worked from a planning revolution that had been evolving for nearly two generations in the Philadelphia region, and which in turn can be linked to Garden City planning as it evolved in Great Britain. This approach sought to create large shared open spaces while excluding the ever-more invasive automobile to the perimeter of sites. In the case of Richard Allen Homes, this later would prove to be part of the undoing of the landscaping which has given way before the requirement for parking in close proximity to housing. The idea of large blocks of space, with the automobile restricted to the perimeter had evolved in the work of Henry Wright, a University of Pennsylvania-trained planner, who later worked with the City Housing Association of New York City, and the Regional Planning Association of America.[25] Wright's ideas reached the nation through his planning of Radburn, New Jersey (1929 - 1931), and with the plans for the Greenbelt cities undertaken by the Urban Resettlement Administration in the 1930s.[26]

In sites such as that of Richard Allen Homes, these ideas were adapted to the Philadelphia grid by the architects/planners of the Philadelphia Housing Authority who eliminated cross streets and instead, created short cul-de-sacs and used existing streets on the perimeter as ring streets. This created triple-sized blocks running north and south. By outlining the original block framework with long strips of apartments, the architects/planners maintained a relationship with the regional context of the row house that also lined the perimeter of city blocks. But, instead of the minimal backyards required by city code, these apartment buildings were surrounded by green edges along the main street fronts on the perimeter of the site and along the courtyard faces of all the buildings. Large green areas shaded by trees were located in the centers between buildings.

By using the large building slabs as dividing elements, the site was organized with four play areas, scattered across the complex, fifteen recreation areas and twelve sitting areas. In contrast to the tiny backyards of the region, which permitted private control, these encouraged communal activity. Similarly, by concentrating the pipe-frame drying yards in small areas, daily interactions could be promoted -- albeit with the risk of loss to clothes.

The typical courtyard of the complex still contains fragmentary bits of the original landscaping elements such as curbs, tree stumps, and small planting areas along buildings which suggest the original plan. From the evidence of varying tones of asphalt, it is possible to determine areas that were formerly green and later were black-topped; open spaces were bordered by the few surviving trees which lined walks and which are now much stressed by the lack of ground moisture. Here and there are the remaining pipe frames of drying yards, and the small play sheds and playground equipment that attest to their earlier civic uses. As the automobile has become more important, the open spaces have been paved over, reversing the original intentions, and resulting in more pavement and more intrusion of traffic into formerly quiet interior courts.

At present, most of the remaining green space is concentrated in the vicinity of the Community Building and along the perimeter of the site where green borders with perimeter trees contrast with the surrounding industrial housing of mid-19th-century Philadelphia. The hierarchy of the

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[25]George E. Thomas, "Wright and Stein, Planners: Radburn, New Jersey, 1929-31," in Strong and Thomas, *The Book of the School: 100 Years of the Graduate School of Fine Arts of the University of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1990), 64-5.

[26]*Ibid.*

complex is suggested by the central position of the Community Building and by the recessed entrance with ornamental yews planted in the small gardens in front. At each end of the Community Building, small grass plots framed by low pipe rails with trees in the center further emphasize its central role. The rear court behind the Community Building has recently been converted to black-top basketball courts at the north end. A small yard, framed by low brick walls and containing a raised level of asphalt forms a small area for supervised play adjacent to the day care center in the Community Building. The low wall is accented by three African heads in *bas relief* with the motto "Lift Every Voice and Sing," references to the intention of Richard Allen Homes being a haven for the blacks of the city.

At the south end of the courtyard, a rusting steel flagpole commemorates the civic function of the central courtyard. The yard still is framed by a few hardy surviving trees along the perimeter of the original walks. Toward the south end, the domestic requirements of the complex take over with the galvanized steel pipes of the "drying yards" at the ends of Buildings #33 and #34.

Other courts such as that between Buildings 39 and 40 had small covered shelters that provided shade for outdoor play areas. These often occurred in the more enclosed center yards, presumably to promote safety. Pipe-frame play equipment has survived hard use between Buildings 21 and 22. Trash sheds, such as that at the east end of Building 30, were part of the site organization as well; finally, pipe frame drying yards at the ends of most of the central rows of buildings recall the typical solution for drying clothing of the era, whether in public housing or in a private row house.

Architectural Vocabulary

Because the buildings were planned as a single project, they share a common architectural vocabulary that was spread across the entire site. But, the buildings were also ruled by a hierarchical arrangement. The most elaborate design is given to the central Community Building. The plainest design is the Maintenance Building. The remainder of the apartment buildings are more or less similar, with some of the longer buildings given emphasis by an additional story and a slightly projecting center.

All of the residential buildings share the common palette of red and white brick laid in common bond, with headers every seventh course. Small metal trimmed canopies over doors correspond to the flat roofs, linking the buildings to International Modernism. Secondary structures, such as the small trash sites, and the shade shelters in the play yards are of the red brick that dominates the site with reinforced concrete roof slabs. Industrial steel sash have now largely been replaced in all of the apartment buildings, but they still survive in the maintenance building and the community building. These details, the pipe railings of the entrance porches, the glazed tile of the entrance halls of the Community Building and so on, link the site to the industrial design of Philadelphia factories.

A secondary overlay of detail enriches the exteriors. The architects reduced the scale of the long rows by contrasting the red brick of the bases with white brick for the upper stories of portions of buildings. The light brick was also derived from Philadelphia industrial buildings which utilized the brick to bounce more light around interior courtyards. Coloristic accents were provided by using panels of red brick between windows of the second stories. Coloristic control was also maintained by using red terra cotta sills, many of which have been replaced with modern slate.

Subtle plasticity results from projecting belt brick courses that cap the red base. These link the projecting canopies over the entrances; another belt course links window sills on the projecting

centers of the larger brick buildings. Above windows in the white brick fields, red bricks form bands that link windows. And, red brick courses between projecting white brick courses form a frieze below the overhanging cornices. The larger buildings also are given a cornice-like balcony on the fourth story, providing a plastic element that enlivens these facades. Finally, round windows, recalling steamship portholes add an exotic touch to the south wall of the Community Building and also appear on the Maintenance Building.

In keeping with the values of modern design, there is minimal differentiation between the front and the rear facades. The fundamental difference is that the units were entered through the canopied entrances, and thus that the fronts of units have the three-dimensional element of the canopy, while the rears had rear kitchen doors. Because the architects intended to turn their buildings inward from the street, the perimeter buildings turn their backs, with kitchen doors to the public sidewalks, while the public doors face in off the interior courts.

The Community Building #30

The Community Building is central to the entire complex, occupying a position midway between Tenth and Eleventh Streets. It consists of three cubic volumes, with a larger central section recessed to form a small courtyard on the north facade, and flanked by two smaller wings. Like the housing, the Community Building is sheathed in red brick along the ground level with white brick on the second story. On the north facade, a central entrance provides access into the main office of the building, while another entrance toward the west end, accented by colorful yellow tile and sheltered by a metal-clad canopy, provided access to the public auditorium on the second floor and the Headstart and daycare program in the basement. Most of the ornamental elements are concentrated at the public entrance. Overhead, the canopy is sheathed in grooved, *art deco* styled metal; on the wall at the door is the dedicatory bronze plaque with the name, "Richard Allen Homes," and with the names of Franklin Roosevelt, President of the United States, and various federal executives, dated 1939 - 1942. The east wing currently contains the mail room for the complex, while the west wing and the upper levels of the east wing contain housing units.

Because of its central role, the Community Building was landscaped more elaborately with a small yard in the recessed central court of the main block planted with low shrubs and trees, and bordered by a grass strip along the front sidewalk. At the rear, the building is centered on the largest of the exterior open spaces. That space is given emphasis by a flagpole on axis with the main building at one end and a low wall with a bas relief of African-featured faces with the legend, "Lift Every Voice and Sing." The low wall encloses the fenced and protected play area of the nursery program that opens from the classrooms on the first and basement levels. Trees originally framed the open space, but asphalt has taken over most of the area.

The interior of the main office along the front of the building is simply detailed. Exposed pipes along the north wall serve as an industrial radiator. Windows retain the original steel frames with inward opening hopper sash while the upper panes are fixed. At the west end of the building is a more generous lobby that provides access off to the side to classrooms and via the stair to more classrooms in the basement, and to the auditorium on the second floor. In the public corridors, lobbies, and stairs, the walls are lined with an hygienic glazed yellow tile, decorated with a dark border. The main lobby at the first floor is decorated above the tile with a mural of African-Americans playing various sports, football on the left, baseball and basketball in the center, and on the right, the areas where blacks already dominated modern sports, boxing and track. It is signed on the lower right by D. Hirsh. A GE Telechron classroom clock is in the center of the mural.

The nursery school classrooms are brightly lighted by large steel framed windows that open onto the south playground. Built in cabinets and bookcases provide a framework for organization, while a private toilet off each classroom denoted contemporary planning for modern schools. Bright colors and banks of fluorescent lights are part of the conventional school vocabulary. Ceilings are exposed concrete with massive concrete structural beams directly expressed and unornamented.

The stairs to the second story are ornamented with an oversized porthole window; railings are detailed with pipe railings of modern industrial design. At the second floor landing, the lobby opens through two pairs of steel doors into a large hall with an elevated stage framed by a proscenium arch at the far end. Curved wall returns at the proscenium are a *moderne* element. The ceiling is again spanned by massive beams that carry the roof. Industrial steel sash with lower operable hoppers provide light and ventilation, while on the south wall, a door opens onto a balcony above the first floor classrooms.

The east end contains the modern security mailboxes for the site. Mail delivery has continued in this building, rather than at individual addresses as part of the effort to create a communal center. A reinforced concrete pier with the remnants of a mushroom capital stands in the center of the room. Around it is a maze of modern mail boxes. Floors are of concrete and the doors to the north front are industrial steel doors. Lighting is provided by modern fluorescent fixtures.

Maintenance Building #53

On the east side of the complex, fronting onto Ninth Street along the elevated rail-lines, is the Maintenance Building which was constructed as part of the project. It serves to screen the eastern block from the noise of the rail line and is a buffer from the street. The building consists of a simple rectangular one-story brick structure with a flat concrete roof. Several of the motifs of the housing tie this building to the complex including projecting brick belt courses that link windows into larger compositional units. At the north end of the main public facade on Ninth Street is another large porthole window of the sort used on the Community Building. The asymmetrical composition was in accord with modern design theory.

The industrial character of the building is particularly expressed by the large loading dock on the west side. In the center is a tall smoke stack for boilers that were once located in the building. Windows are raised above head height to provide good illumination above work table. The sash are of steel, four lights across and four down, with an operable central panel of four lights. Modern steel security grills protect the windows. The building is much altered by blocking up windows on the east, where it is liable to vandalism, and by graffiti which covers most accessible portions of the lower walls.

The Apartments

The apartment buildings fall into three distinct building types: the smaller, unarticulated three-story buildings which typically are placed in the centers of blocks; the larger three-story buildings with a projecting central volume; and the largest three-story buildings with projecting four-story central block. The majority of these are three-story buildings that originally contained 972 units, while the four-story buildings contained 352 units. With a total of 1,324 units in 52 buildings on the site, accommodating 6000 persons, it was the size of a small village.

Apartment plans varied between single-story flats that ranged from one to four bedrooms, and two-story "duplexes" that included eat-in kitchens, with two bedrooms to four bedroom units with eat-in kitchens. Apartment types, to some extent, were related to building types. For example, most of the smallest apartments, the three room (living room, pullman kitchen, bath, and bedroom) and the four room (living room, pullman kitchen, bath, master bedroom, bedroom) were concentrated in the larger four-story buildings. On the three-story buildings, the top two levels were duplexes, eliminating the public stair above the second story, while the first floors were uniformly small flats. On the four-story buildings, the top stories contained small flats, using the balconies as a second means of fire egress. However, examples of most types of units can be found scattered on all floors of each of the three building types. In the end, there were 26 different configurations in the 52 buildings.

Number of stories	Plan type	Number of Bedrooms	Number of units of this type in complex
4	3 room	1	208
4	4 room	2	144
3	4 1/2 room	2	729
3	5 room	3	102
3	5 1/2 room	3	51
3	6 room	4	90

Within this overall organization by building type, units also varied by whether they were a single level flat, or a two-level duplex. This was typically organized by floor within the building types. For example, the flats tend to be on the first floor while the duplexes occupy the upper levels, reducing the runs of the public stairs.

Plan type	Floors where type is found	Unit type
3 room	1,2,3,4	1 bedroom flat
4 room	1,2,3,4	2 bedroom flats
4 1/2 room	1	2 bedroom flat with large kitchen
	2,3	2 bedroom duplex
5 room	1	3 bedroom flat
	2,3	3 bedroom duplex
5 1/2 room	1	3 bedroom flat with large kitchen
	2,3	3 bedroom duplex with large kitchen
6 1/2 room	1	4 bedroom flat with large kitchen
	2,3	4 bedroom duplex with large kitchen

Construction

The exterior walls are sheathed in brick over cinder block with metal furring. Interior walls are remarkably thin, consisting of plastered wire lath over metal studs for most partitions. Original windows had steel frames and steel sash. They were typically replaced in 1973 with aluminum sash in different configurations from the original design. In keeping with the norms of Philadelphia architecture, windows denote by their size, the types of spaces of the interior. Oversized windows light living rooms, tiny windows with raised sills denote bathrooms.

The buildings were constructed of reinforced concrete frames on concrete pilings with grade beams except for a few buildings such as # 51 which include a basement for boilers to heat other

buildings. Concrete beam and slab construction carries the upper stories and forms the interior ceilings and the roofs. A row of columns down the center of each building formed one of the principal constraints of interior planning and was part of the determining features of the interior subdivision of space.

Construction Details

While the apartments were significant improvements over the former living conditions of the neighborhood, they were clearly detailed so as to avoid the charge of luxury. Entrance vestibules and stairs were spartan. Detailing ranged from industrial pipe railings and steel stairs to plain steel doors in steel frames. Within the units, floors and ceilings were the concrete slab of the structure. Partitions were the thinnest possible construction, apparently intended to make use of every inch of space. This was generally necessary because of the minimal sizes of the rooms. Metal nosings protected the exposed ends of partitions. Millwork was minimized as well. While bathrooms and bedrooms had paneled doors, closets did not. They were provided with a rod from which could be suspended a curtain. Instead of providing baseboards, simple rubber bases were applied to the wall.

Apartment Plans

Apartment plans were motivated by the desire for economy and their layout was determined largely by the construction grid. Rooms tend to fit within single construction bays established by outside walls and interior columns. For example in the "3 room house for 2 persons," the living room is in one bay framed by two piers, the bedroom is in another bay and the kitchen and bathroom, circulation and storage closets fill the third bay. For some of the larger units, the construction bay is slightly wider and the stair to the second level is placed on the far side of the column, creating a one-and-a-half-bay-wide room including the stair.

In the single floor flats, small living rooms opened into pullman kitchens. Corridors to the bedroom and bath were as small as possible. The corridor usually contained a minimal closet as well as a linen closet. Bedrooms usually contained a closet, though not always. Smaller bedrooms were suited only for twin beds, while the typical bedroom could contain a double bed, a dresser and a chair.

Although it would have been possible for all first floor units to have their own grade-level doors to the outside, social engineering dictated that all apartments were to be entered from shared entrances denoted on the facades by overhanging canopies. These canopies were sheathed in a simplified version of the grooved metal canopy of the entrance to the Community Building. These entrances were each shared by six units, two per landing, promoting community at the expense of personal privilege. They link the planning of the apartment buildings to the theme of the landscaping as well.

Kitchens were furnished minimally with an open closet which could be fitted out as a larder. Space for a small refrigerator was left in a corner. A sink on a base cabinet and an overhead hanging cabinet provided storage for pots and dishes. The original cabinets appear to have been modern metal. Small stoves completed the layout. For the larger units, kitchens were enlarged, making room for a table, though size was only partly correlated with the number of rooms. The largest kitchen appears to have been in the "4 room home for 3,4 or 5 persons," a two-level unit with kitchen the full width of the living room. The kitchens for the "5 room home for 4, 5 or 6 persons," and the "6 room home for 6, 7, 8 or 9 persons" were smaller because even though the

unit width was increased, a bedroom was cut out of the space where the kitchen might have expanded. Kitchens are equipped with gas for cooking.

Bathrooms were built on a module of less than five feet in length, with tubs under the window, a toilet and a sink on the wet wall, backing up against the kitchen. Ceramic tile flooring was the principal luxury. In keeping with the standards of the day, the number of bathrooms and their size did not increase with the units with the consequence that there was as much invested in the bathroom of a three-room, two-person unit as for a nine-person, six-room unit.

Mechanical Systems

The buildings are served by gas fired boilers that provide heat through iron pipes that function as radiators. That system appears in the Community Building #30 and is derived from contemporary Philadelphia industry. In the apartments, heat is ducted from heat exchangers through grills that are mounted on the interior walls. In later years, some of the furnaces have been eliminated and steam is piped from central buildings.

Alterations

Despite the small sizes of the units, most have retained their original interior configuration with little change. Alterations have been restricted to cosmetic items. Exterior doors and windows were replaced in separate campaigns, the windows in the 1970s, the doors in the 1980s. Kitchens have been modernized with new cabinets. Some flooring has been replaced and interior paint colors have been updated. Despite these changes, the units are very much as they were originally constructed.

Sources of Information:

A. Architectural drawings: An original set of 88 architectural drawings (including site, landscaping, and structural plans) dated August 5, 1940, are filed in a secure place at the Schuylkill Falls office of the Philadelphia Housing Authority, 4325 Merrick Road, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In addition to this complete set of drawings, the PHA holds in this collection: a site plan showing street numbering and dwelling unit numbering, dated March 30, 1942; one electrical drawing dated August 1, 1966; and three window replacement drawings dating from the early 1970s by architect William A. Mann.

B. Historic views: Temple University Urban Archives holds the Philadelphia Housing Authority's Annual Reports in Annual Reports Box 64. Historic views of Richard Allen Homes appear in the following volumes: *Building Homes in Philadelphia* (July 1, 1939 - June 30, 1941); *Homes for War Workers and Families of Low Income* (July 1, 1941 - June 30, 1943); and *Report of the Philadelphia Housing Authority* (June 1943 - June 1950). Temple University Urban Archives, located in the ground floor, Paley Library, Temple University, 13th Street and Berks Mall, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

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Project Information:

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has decided to implement a Major Reconstruction of Obsolete Project proposal, a new development proposal (PA26-P002-113), and an Urban Revitalization Demonstration Project proposal at Richard Allen Homes. The comprehensive redevelopment plan will entail construction of new buildings, rehabilitation and maintenance, and selective demolition. Because HUD determined that the Richard Allen Homes public housing project is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places, it entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the City of Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Housing Authority, the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. In that MOA, dated September 1993, the Philadelphia Housing Authority agreed to record the entire Richard Allen Homes project for the Historic American Buildings Survey. Photographs for the HABS report were taken in May 1995. The written documentation was completed in December 1995.

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Location Map

Source: USGS Philadelphia Quadrangle